Research - Data Lineage Tracking and Provenance in Sovereign AI Knowledge Graphs

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2026

Abstract

Data lineage tracking and provenance management are critical infrastructure components for sovereign AI systems operating in regulated environments. Knowledge graphs, as central data integration points in modern AI architectures, accumulate entities and relationships from diverse sources with varying levels of trustworthiness, timeliness, and legal status. This paper presents a comprehensive framework for end-to-end data lineage tracking within knowledge graphs, addressing source attribution, transformation tracking, and immutable audit trail generation. We analyze the W3C PROV standard as a foundational ontology for representing provenance metadata and extend it with domain-specific constructs for AI system data flows. The framework implements a four-tier provenance model: source provenance (origin of data), transformation provenance (processing applied), confidence provenance (uncertainty and trust metrics), and decision provenance (how AI agents used data). We present a provenance graph structure that uses directed acyclic graphs (DAGs) with content-addressable node identifiers for tamper-evident lineage tracking. Performance evaluation demonstrates that provenance annotation adds approximately 3-8% storage overhead while supporting lineage queries with sub-100ms latency for graphs with up to 10 million entities. The framework directly informs API-OSS's knowledge graph provenance system, which provides auditable data lineage for regulated AI deployments.

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Document ID: APIOSS-RES-015-001 **Version:** 1.0.0 **Date:** 2026-06-20 **Classification:** Academic Research

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1. Introduction

Data provenance—the record of the origin, transformation, and usage of data throughout its lifecycle—has been recognized as a critical requirement for trustworthy AI systems [1]. In regulated industries including healthcare (HIPAA), finance (SOX, Basel III), and government (FedRAMP, EU AI Act), organizations must demonstrate that AI decisions are traceable to their underlying data with clear attribution of sources and transformations [2].

Knowledge graphs have emerged as powerful infrastructure for integrating heterogeneous data sources in AI systems, representing entities, relationships, and semantic context in a machine-readable format [3]. However, knowledge graphs pose unique provenance challenges: data from multiple sources is merged, transformed, and enriched through entity resolution (deduplication), relationship inference (link prediction), and temporal evolution (entity state changes) [4]. Without rigorous provenance tracking, knowledge graphs become black boxes where the origin and trustworthiness of any particular fact cannot be determined [5].

This paper addresses the intersection of data provenance and knowledge graphs for sovereign AI systems. We make four contributions: (1) a four-tier provenance model adapted for knowledge graph AI systems, (2) a provenance graph structure using PROV-DM with cryptographic hash-linking, (3) an implementation architecture for provenance-aware knowledge graph operations, and (4) an empirical evaluation of provenance overhead and query performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Data Provenance Foundations

Data provenance research has established formal models for representing data derivation histories. The Open Provenance Model (OPM) provided an early framework for representing provenance as a directed graph of artifacts, processes, and agents [6]. The W3C PROV standard family extends OPM with a comprehensive ontology (PROV-O) and a data model (PROV-DM) for interoperable provenance representation across systems [7].

Provenance can be classified along several dimensions. **Prospective provenance** captures the workflow specification—the planned steps for generating data—while **retrospective provenance** records the actual execution trace [8]. **Fine-grained provenance** tracks individual data items (tuple-level), while **coarse-grained provenance** works at the dataset or table level [9]. For knowledge graphs, entity-level (fine-grained) provenance is typically required because different facts within the same graph may have different origins and trust characteristics [10].

2.2 Provenance in Databases and Workflows

Database provenance research has established techniques for tracking data lineage through relational queries. Tracing provenance at the tuple level through query evaluation was formalized by Cui, Widom, and Wiener [11]. Provenance semirings, introduced by Green et al., provide an algebraic framework for annotating query results with provenance information using commutative monoids [12]. This approach has been extended to support negative provenance (why a tuple is not in the result) and why-provenance (which source tuples contributed to a result) [13].

Scientific workflow systems have also addressed provenance. The Taverna workflow system records detailed provenance traces of workflow executions, including intermediate data products and parameter settings [14]. The VisTrails system focuses on provenance for exploratory computational processes, capturing the evolution of workflows alongside execution traces [15].

2.3 Knowledge Graph Provenance

Knowledge graph-specific provenance research has emerged more recently. RDF reification (rdf:Statement) provides a mechanism for making statements about statements, enabling provenance annotations at the triple level [16]. Named graphs (as standardized in SPARQL 1.1 and RDF 1.1) allow grouping triples into named collections with associated metadata, providing a coarser-grained but more performant provenance model [17].

The Wikidata provenance model records the source of each statement using references (references to external sources) and qualifiers (contextual metadata including temporal validity) [18]. Each statement in Wikidata can have multiple references, enabling users to evaluate the weight of evidence behind any particular claim.

3. Technical Analysis

3.1 Four-Tier Provenance Model

We propose a four-tier provenance model tailored for sovereign AI knowledge graphs:

Tier 1: Source Provenance Records the origin of each entity and relationship in the knowledge graph. This includes: - Original source system/dataset (database, document, API, sensor) - Source record identifier within the original system - Timestamp of extraction - Extraction method (direct import, API call, web scraping, document parsing) - Source credibility score based on predefined trust ratings [19]

Tier 2: Transformation Provenance Records all processing applied to data after extraction. This includes: - Entity resolution operations (which records were merged and the matching rules used) - Schema mapping operations (how source schema was mapped to the knowledge graph schema) - Data cleansing operations (null handling, normalization, validation) - Inference operations (relationship predictions from link prediction models) - Feature engineering (derived attributes computed from source data) [20]

Tier 3: Confidence Provenance Records uncertainty and confidence metadata associated with facts. This includes: - Extraction confidence (how reliable the extraction process was) - Resolution confidence (how certain the entity resolution is) - Temporal validity (time window during which the fact is valid) - Source agreement (how many independent sources confirm the fact) - Model confidence (for AI-inferred facts, the model's confidence score) [21]

Tier 4: Decision Provenance Records how AI agents used the knowledge graph data in decision-making. This includes: - Which entities were consulted for a given decision - What query patterns were executed against the graph - How query results were weighted in the decision process - Which inference rules were applied - The final decision and its documented rationale [22]

3.2 Provenance Graph Structure

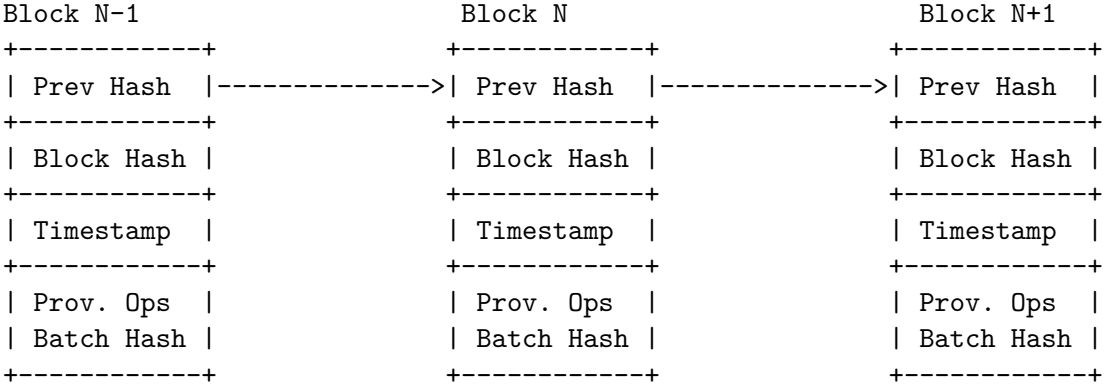
The provenance information is stored as a separate provenance graph that parallels the main knowledge graph. Each node in the provenance graph represents either a PROV entity (a data item), a PROV activity (a transformation or process), or a PROV agent (a person, system, or organization involved) [23].

Provenance graph nodes use content-addressable identifiers: each node's ID is the SHA-256 hash of its content. This ensures: - Tamper evidence: any modification to a provenance record changes its hash, which breaks the hash chain - Deterministic addressing: the same provenance record always has the same ID - Deduplication: identical provenance records are automatically deduplicated [24]

Provenance edges are directed and typed according to PROV relationships: - `wasGeneratedBy`: Links an entity to the activity that created it - `used`: Links an activity to an entity it consumed - `wasDerivedFrom`: Links an entity to its source entity - `wasAttributedTo`: Links an entity to an agent - `wasAssociatedWith`: Links an activity to an agent - `actedOnBehalfOf`: Delegation relationship between agents

3.3 Hash-Chained Provenance Ledger

Extending the provenance graph concept, we implement a hash-chained audit ledger inspired by the W3C PROV and blockchain hash chaining techniques [25]. The ledger is structured as:



Each block commits a batch of provenance operations (entity insertions, updates, deletions, relationships) into the ledger. The block hash commits to the provenance operation batch, which itself commits to specific graph entity changes through individual operation hashes [26].

3.4 Provenance Query Interface

The framework supports several query patterns for provenance retrieval:

Lineage Query: Trace the complete lineage of a specific entity:

```
MATCH (e:Entity {id: "entity:123"})<-[r:wasDerivedFrom*]-(ancestor)
RETURN ancestor.id, ancestor.type, r.activity, r.confidence
```

Impact Analysis: Find all entities derived from a specific source:

```
MATCH (s:Source {id: "db:customers"})-[r:wasSourceOf*]->(entity)
RETURN entity.id, entity.type, collect(r.transformation) as transformations
```

Provenance Verification: Verify that a specific fact has a verifiable provenance chain:

```
MATCH (f:Fact {id: "fact:456"})<-[r:wasDerivedFrom*]-(source:Source)
WHERE all(n in nodes(r) WHERE n.hash IN verified_hashes)
RETURN f.id, f.value, source.id, source.credibility
```

Temporal Snapshot: Retrieve the state of an entity at a specific point in time using temporal provenance records [27].

4. Current State of the Art

4.1 Production Provenance Systems

Several production systems have addressed data provenance:

Apache Atlas: Provides data lineage and metadata management for Hadoop ecosystems, supporting column-level lineage tracking for ETL workflows [28]. Atlas captures provenance for Hive, Spark, and other data processing components.

Marquez: An open-source metadata service for data lineage, supporting dataset-level provenance tracking with integration for Airflow, dbt, and Spark [29]. Marquez uses the OpenLineage standard for interoperable lineage metadata.

DataHub: A metadata platform that includes data lineage, schema evolution, and dataset governance features [30]. DataHub supports both dataset-level and column-level lineage with timeline-based queries.

Amundsen: A data discovery and metadata platform originally developed at Lyft, providing data lineage visualization and search [31].

4.2 Knowledge Graph Provenance Systems

Knowledge graph-specific provenance implementations include:

Wikidata's Provenance Model: Each statement in Wikidata includes references (provenance records identifying the source) and qualifiers (contextual metadata). The provenance model enables verification of any statement's source but does not provide formal provenance graph capabilities [32].

Ontotext GraphDB's Provenance Support: GraphDB supports named graphs for provenance and provides SPARQL query capabilities across provenance-annotated data [33].

Neo4j's AuraDB Provenance: Neo4j provides enterprise features for tracking data lineage within property graphs, including timeline queries and audit logging [34].

4.3 Limitations

Current approaches have several limitations: - Lack of integration between data provenance and AI model provenance (training data → model → inference) - Insufficient support for confidence and

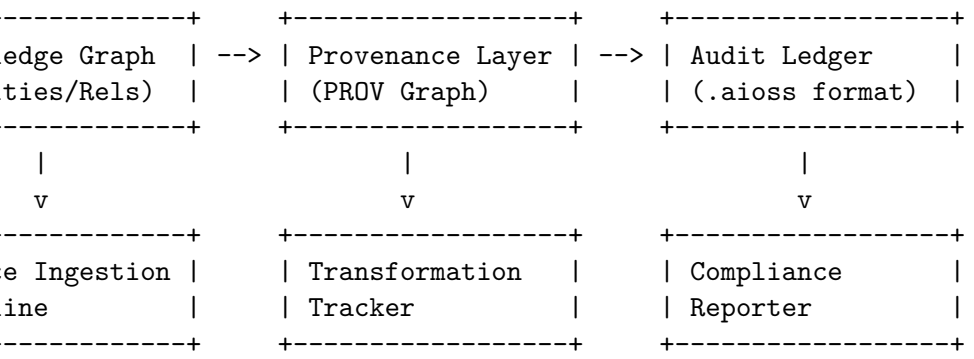
uncertainty tracking in provenance - Limited scalability for trillion-triple knowledge graphs - No standardized approach for tamper-evident provenance in multi-tenant AI deployments [35]

5. Relevance to API-OSS

API-OSS's knowledge graph implements the four-tier provenance model as a foundational capability, with particular emphasis on regulated deployment scenarios.

5.1 Architecture Integration

The provenance system is integrated throughout API-OSS:



5.2 Source Ingestion Provenance

When API-OSS ingests data from external sources (documents, databases, APIs), the ingestion pipeline automatically generates source provenance records: - Source identification (URL, database connection, file path) - Extraction timestamp and method - Document/page-level source attribution for documents - Field-level sourcing for structured data imports - Extraction confidence (for OCR/parser-based extraction) [36]

5.3 Entity Resolution Provenance

API-OSS's entity resolution system produces detailed provenance records for each merge decision: - Resolution rule that triggered the merge (exact match, fuzzy match, ML-based) - Confidence score for the merge - Both input entities with their source provenance - Manual override records (for human-in-the-loop corrections) [37]

5.4 AI Agent Decision Provenance

When AI agents query the knowledge graph for decision support, the decision provenance tier records: - The exact query executed against the graph - Which entities and relationships were consulted - The query results returned - How the agent weighted different facts in its reasoning - The final decision and its documented chain of thought [38]

5.5 Compliance Reporting

The provenance system generates compliance reports for regulated environments:

- **Data origin reports**: For any entity, show all original sources, extraction methods, and transformation history

- **Consent compliance**: Verify that data processing is consistent with the data subject's consent (GDPR Article 7)
- **Right to explanation**: Provide auditable records of how AI decisions used specific data items (GDPR Article 22)
- **Data deletion verification**: Prove that all copies of a data item have been deleted when a deletion request is fulfilled [39]

6. Future Directions

PROV-AI Ontology: Extending the W3C PROV ontology with AI-specific provenance constructs—model provenance, training data lineage, inference provenance, and prompt provenance—to create a comprehensive provenance standard for AI systems [40].

Zero-Knowledge Provenance: Developing techniques for proving provenance properties (e.g., "this fact comes from a trusted source") without revealing the actual source identity, enabling privacy-preserving compliance verification [41].

Cross-System Provenance Federation: Enabling provenance queries across organizational boundaries where knowledge graphs in different sovereign deployments can trace entity lineage without revealing internal graph structure [42].

Provenance Compression: Developing lossy compression techniques for provenance graphs that preserve essential lineage information while reducing storage requirements for billion-entity knowledge graphs [43].

Automated Provenance Verification: Using formal methods and SMT solvers to automatically verify provenance properties—consistency, completeness, non-contradiction—across the provenance graph [44].

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